

A Note from the Proprietor

Every life is full of dreams. Some are fleeting. Others stay with us, evolving over time, gaining resolution and refinement, and, if all goes well, eventually bearing fruit. They differ for each of us, as profoundly as we differ from one another. Yet the idea that we can transform our dreams from the edge of consciousness into the central realities of our own and others' lives underlies much of our particular Western tradition.

Those of us who awaken at some point to the desire for something more lasting than momentary pleasures are lucky in the best sense of the word. That knowledge—the awareness that growth cannot occur in the absence of roots—makes it possible to imagine, and perhaps to pull into existence, something that may last for many generations. That can mean a lifetime of enormous effort, sustained in hope of sublime beauty, year after year, in the face of nature's vagaries. It is not for everyone. But it is the essence of a life lived close to the land, where continuity and accident are constantly in counterpoint, the ultimate contrast to a life perfectly planned or lived from moment to moment, without a thought for a future far beyond our own.

Everything happens in season. A life can barrel ahead on a trajectory of ever-greater speed and risk until it reaches an edge almost too far. For some of us that verge may become a pivot point, perhaps one of many that we may reach in succession as we progress. In all the experiences accrued and relationships formed up to that point, there may somewhere be the stuff of a future worth a complete, single-minded, wholehearted commitment. I have found that the important thing is to sort through all the possibilities in an attempt to find clarity, and then to live passionately and purposefully enough to allow that dream a chance to materialize. It is only in retrospect, however, that we can see how our lives come to be what they are, no matter how well or wisely or far ahead we think we plan them. For instance, does an early love of gardening and the elation of childhood bicycle rides to a winery neighborhoods away necessarily develop into a life of winegrowing?

Perhaps not, but there is no doubt that such experiences plant the kind of indelible sense memories that quicken a passion for the land and its possibilities. Certainly, the shape of a grape leaf is generous, and unforgettable. The smell of damp earth is elemental, as is the feel of soil between the fingers. A cool, yeasty winery may certainly be a tantalizing haven for a child on a hot summer day, when everything is felt more deeply. But a straight shot from those early experiences to a wine estate in the Napa Valley? More like a meandering path.

Sometimes it takes outside events, the course of history, to give form and momentum to personal dreams that have been hovering on the edge of realization. Who would have thought, given the state of the wine industry in the first couple of decades after the Second World War, that Napa Valley could reinvent itself as a wine capital? For those of us who began coming here in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it was a sleepy little place in a magnificent wild landscape. Maybe a dozen wineries had survived through Prohibition and after. They welcomed wine tasters, and were flexible in their entry policies—a draw to college kids from Berkeley and elsewhere within driving distance. Some of us came away from those visits with the dream of one day having a little winery in the Napa Valley.



The opening of the Mondavi Winery in 1966 brought the possibility of creating a winery into somewhat sharper focus. For the first time, it struck me that one person with a sharply defined vision and tremendous reserves of energy could shepherd into being something entirely unique, something that set new standards—simply through a dream and the force of passion and will. I began the search for land in Napa Valley in 1972, and made repeated visits to vineyards in Europe to try to understand what conditions yielded the world's finer wines. In the meantime, Napa Valley had begun its renaissance as a winegrowing center on par with the world's finest, which the wine-drinking world began to discover in the mid-1970s. As new restaurants began to establish an equally high standard for fine dining, and as a few small and beautiful hotels also opened their doors, Napa

Valley gradually gained a specific gravity as a destination for those whose interest in wine inspired them to visit the wine country and learn firsthand about it and the quality of life that it supports.

The first Napa Valley Wine Auction, in 1981, was a significant milestone along the road of Napa's evolution into America's finest wine growing region. The Napa Valley Vintners began planning the event, modeled after the Hospices de Beaune, in 1979 to increase awareness of the wine-growing resurgence under way here and to raise funds for local hospitals. The start of the planning coincided with the purchase of Meadowood, which hosted the first auction and continues to hold it today. Over the years the auction has grown substantially, and now counts more than twenty area service organizations as beneficiaries. It has also served to help unify the community. The coming-together began in the auction's early years, when it drew almost 1,000 volunteers, many of whom had never before worked together; it has remained a cohering force for the Napa Valley as both have grown.

Preparations for the auction led me on a trip to France organized by Robert Mondavi in 1980, even as the hunt for vineyard land for Harlan Estate and the development of Meadowood continued. He arranged visits to the first growths of Bordeaux and many of the grands crus of Burgundy—a transformative experience. Clarity followed, as did an entirely new perspective on the world of wine. Seeing those estates, meeting the families in whose hands they'd resided generation after generation, witnessing the noble pursuit of creating something artful from the land at the highest possible level shifted the paradigm of the romantic little vineyard to that of a winegrowing estate that might, in time, with the right team, yield a wine that would be welcomed among the first growths. This meant establishing, in the manner of a first growth, a discernible, principled culture and a cogently defined aesthetic—the character of an estate and a wine—something that could last for generations. It also meant, for me, the eventual coaxing of a winegrowing



estate from unproved land, untouched by human hand (see photo, page 24). To endeavor to achieve that in the hills of the Napa Valley felt a worthy challenge.

Lacking the right land, the necessary team, and the winemaking knowledge meant there was much to do—and to learn. The first step was to start a small winery, which, like so many others, used purchased fruit and borrowed winemaking facilities. By that time, fortunately, the first members of what would later become the Harlan Estate team had joined in the trial venture. There, during the 1980s, we began our serious studies into wine, winemaking, and grape growing—and all that that entailed. That winery released its first vintage in 1983, approximately 250 cases of cabernet and 200 cases of chardonnay. It grew rapidly and was later sold at the appropriate time. But in addition to the knowledge and experience gained, the great fortune of that undertaking came with building a wonderful team. Happening on people who help make ideas become reality is one of life's finer gifts. Most of the key individuals involved in bringing Harlan Estate about have been working together for more than twenty-five years. The benefits of that continuity, consistency, and longevity are, we hope, clearly discernible, for they permeate every aspect of our undertaking. As our plans bear fruit, our hope is that they will provide a culture sufficient for the estate's continued improvement well into the future.

The true beginning of Harlan Estate dates to 1984, with the acquisition of the first forty acres of raw land in the hills above Oakville. A rugged stretch of terrain covered with forests, oak woodlands, and riparian areas, it is as fertile and as full of wildlife as nature intended. Over the next decade or so we gradually added another few hundred acres spread further across the hillsides. Since that initial purchase in 1984, slowly, carefully, a small portion of the wilderness has come under vine: Harlan Estate planted its first six acres in 1985, the next eighteen acres in 1986 and 1987, and fifteen additional acres in the early 1990s. Phylloxera necessitated the replanting of the original six acres in 1999. The most recent plantings occurred in 2002 and 2004. Over the last decade and a half, we discreetly carved another five acres out of the forests and woodlands for the winery, additional roads, the family home, gardens and parklands, and so on. The balance of the estate, however, will remain much as it is now, as it has been for centuries. Detailed planning for each facet of the property and responsible stewardship should ensure its future health and well-being for generations to come.

To design and create something that has never before existed in the hope that it will survive for centuries means that each of the thousands of decisions involved in its making requires clarity of thought and purpose—and intimate knowledge of the terrain where the building and planting will occur. That is only gained through time and experience, which in this case came after long months, even years, of walking the property and getting to know it foot by foot, intimately, in all its idiosyncrasies. Before the first cut cleaves the ground, a general master plan must exist. Developing such a plan takes time and the expertise of a team of not only winemaker and estate manager, but also geologist and forester, landscape designer and architect. As the winegrowing estate evolves in time, so, too, does the master plan, because nothing in nature or made by man is static.



During Harlan Estate's first year, we brought the first roads through the dense forest, cleared and prepared the vineyard lands, developed water sources and drainage—painstakingly building an infrastructure where none previously existed. Next came all the obvious and not so obvious questions associated with how best to plant the vineyards themselves. There was no way to know for a decade or more whether the choices we made were the best choices. Yet the abiding concern was to ensure that every choice that we made to intervene with the raw land would allow us to farm it in as sustainable and ecologically sound a way as possible—a way that preserves the land and allows it to evolve toward its potential.



For centuries, many hillside winegrowers spent each spring hoisting up to the top of the hill the soil that had run off the slope in the winter rains. That was not the intention here. Clearing those initial vineyards and laying in a cover crop for four years ensured that, as we began to layout and plan future vineyards on the steeper hillsides, no such erosion would occur.





The selection of varieties, rootstocks, and clones, and the design of row spacing, direction, and trellises, came after the development of water supply and drainage. After much deliberation, the planting of those first vineyards with Bordeaux varieties proceeded. The estate made wine in 1987, 1988, and 1989—none of which went to market, because the quality we had hoped for hadn't yet appeared. The 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1993 were in the bottle, and the 1994 in the barrel, before

anyone at Harlan Estate ever sat down with a critic to taste the wines. The first release, vintage 1990, was in 1996, because only then did we feel we had a wine of sufficient character and quality—and the backup vintages to follow.

A winegrowing estate is not just the wine, and it's not just the land, the vineyards, the culture, and the values. It is also the family. With family and extended family—the team—comes the root system of shared commitments that ties each of us to place, to purpose, to community—and to the promise of a shared future, generation after generation. And once the dream of the winery became clear, that's what happened here. For me, the history of the estate, the wine, and the family are inseparable. Ten months after the purchase of the first forty acres, I met my future wife, Deborah. We married the following May. Will, our son, was born the following July, which is when the estate made its first vintage. One year later, we bonded the winery and made our first wine on site. Amanda, our daughter, arrived in 1989. The following year, we produced the first vintage we eventually took to market. The team came first. The vineyards came second. The winery followed, and after that came the family home. In the twelve years that elapsed from the acquisition of the land until the release of the first wine, a family came into being. In the thirteen years since, it has grown with the estate to first maturity.

What was once a singular dream has materialized in time into a passion that has fueled the life's work of all those committed to it. And so the estate has





evolved. Over the last twenty-five years, we have carved a portion of the forest into a ranch, and refined that ranch into a winegrowing estate of human transitions—of vineyards, winery, home and gardens, indelible and seemingly indigenous, hovering on the verge between tamed and wild.

Wine enhances friendship, conversation, health, and romance. It illuminates great and ancient human traditions of local culture and global commerce. It may even spark the winegrower's dream, an intertwined vision of family

and family endeavor and place and community born of the legacy of the vine. Whether or not the relationship with land, vine, and grape is close, even hands-on, its very existence reminds us that many of life's wonders come only in their proper time—not before, and not instantly. The agricultural existence measures time and submits to it, to the vagaries of nature, and to her indomitable seasons. Winegrowers know this well: from a vineyard's first planting to maturity sufficient for fruit of great quality is a span of ten years. Five more years must pass before the wine reaches its early potential. As the wine continues to age, it evolves to bring an even deeper pleasure.

While the dream existed twenty-five years before the acquisition of the first forty acres, it could not have found its reality without two things. First, the belief that it was in fact possible to create something absolutely new, enduring, and to a very high standard—something that enriches peoples' lives—here, in America, in California, in Napa Valley. Second, the awareness that the centuries-old European models—the great châteaux of France, the villas of Italy, the quintas of Portugal—had much to teach about the idylls of place and permanence, of family and history, of the heritage that is the art of wine. In the quarter of a century since we found our particular piece of land above Oakville, our knowledge of it has deepened and our understanding of wine's great traditions have broadened. Yet we have only just begun to understand this land sufficiently to bring it into its current form. And I feel that is as it should be, for fine wines evolve over decades, and winegrowing estates, families, and communities across generations.

— H. William Harlan
Oakville, 2010